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Councilmembers Helen Gym and Kenyatta Johnson and Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Leaders Call for Investigation and Demand Action on Abuse and Cover Up at Glen Mills

PHILADELPHIA—Today, Councilmembers Helen Gym (At-Large) and Kenyatta Johnson (2nd District) joined juvenile justice advocates to demand immediate action in response to allegations of systemic abuse and cover ups detailed in today's *Philadelphia Inquirer* investigation into Glen Mills Schools.

The *Inquirer* investigation featured the stories of former Glen Mills students and staff who documented shocking violence at the school, including frequent and severe physical and emotional abuse that included broken bones and teeth. The newspaper report depicted a culture of intimidation which included pervasive efforts to silence children and whistleblowers, and documented efforts to hide the abuse from authorities. It also highlighted the lack of state oversight of residential placement facilities, which rake in over \$100 million a year from the City of Philadelphia and the School District of Philadelphia.

"I am demanding an immediate independent state and local investigation into Glen Mills Schools, specifically around the evidence of potential abuse, coverup, witness intimidation, and what criminal and civil laws may have been broken," said **Councilmember Helen Gym (At-Large)**. "I am glad that the City closed intake into the facility, but I am deeply concerned about the safety of the youth who are there currently. I will use the full power of my position to call for the immediate removal of all Philadelphia youth from this facility. I will keep fighting for reforms that banish the archaic and tragic practice of sending our young people to places that endanger and abuse them."

Councilmember Gym, chair of the Committee on Children and Youth, and co-sponsor of the resolution to establish a Youth Placement Task Force, called the *Inquirer's* investigation "shocking and horrifying." She also noted that Glen Mills Schools had failed to respond to an inquiry from City Council members. In 2016 Gym led a call for an immediate end to the City's

contract with Wordsworth, following a homicide and multiple allegations of sexual abuse at that facility.

“The entire system has failed these children every step of the way. This report further confirms well documented and atrocious instances of child abuse at Glen Mills. It is unacceptable that young men, primarily of color, are being beaten by their counselors with little accountability from leadership, except when reports of violence surface in the media,” said **Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson (2nd District)**. “There needs to be a sweeping overhaul of Glen Mills’ leadership and management to change the culture of violence and as a city we must seriously reconsider our contract with Glen Mills.”

“It’s simply horrifying to read that the government systems intended to protect and heal our most vulnerable children have failed again,” said **Donna Cooper, Executive Director of Public Citizens for Children and Youth**. “Every player including the Philadelphia Courts, the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services, as well as Philadelphia’s Department of Human Services must do some soul searching to find the will and the commitment to finally create the conditions that will heal our most injured children and demonstrate an intolerance to providers that willfully permit staff to inflict harm on these very children.”

“The *Inquirer’s* reporting shines a powerful light on the horrific abuses and trauma that occurs far too often in the juvenile justice system,” said **Keir Bradford-Grey, Chief Defender for the Defender Association of Philadelphia**. “The Defender Association fights for the humanity of children every day—defending and protecting children, and advocating for transparency, accountability, and reform. The juvenile justice system must do better. None of us can look the other way. No child should ever be subject to this kind of abuse. We must bring the voices of our children into the fight against mass incarceration.”

“Today’s report on the persistent abuses rampant at Glen Mills is an all too familiar story of our failures as a community to protect the rights and well-being of our children,” said **Sue Mangold, CEO of Juvenile Law Center**. “The intimidation of youth, parents, staff, and family members who try to report abuse is especially damning. State and county agencies must intervene and do a better job to protect our youth; this is utterly unacceptable. Juvenile Law Center is dedicated to fighting to ensure that youth in institutional placements do not endure this kind of horrific treatment. No child deserves this.”

“These heart wrenching and harrowing stories expose the reality of relentless physical and emotional abuse, terror, and trauma,” said **Maura McInerney, Legal Director at the Education Law Center**. “They reflect state statistics highlighted in our report [*Unsafe and Uneducated*](#), which chronicles multiple incidents of staff physical maltreatment and calculates an average of one incident of child maltreatment every other month at Glen Mills from December 2013 to January 2017 alone. This ongoing abuse cannot be tolerated, and yet it has been: the state has

failed to revoke a single Glen Mills certificate of compliance while children have been forced to live in fear and parents have been silenced. Time is of the essence—the abuse, cover-ups, and placement of children at Glen Mills must end now.”

“Glen Mills’ promises of reform mean nothing. Glen Mills gets public money and it’s time for public accountability. Youth United for Change supports the calls for an immediate independent investigation and the swift firing of the entire staff and leadership,” said **Rapheal Randall, Executive Director of Youth United for Change.**

“Glen Mills reads like a house of horrors for young boys,” said **Nancy Nguyen, Executive Director of VietLead.** “The leadership should all be fired and the campus should be shut down.”

“It is clear that the culture of fear and violence at Glen Mills Academy has been developed over decades and is engrained in how the executive director and staff conduct daily operations. This institution has been monitored and funded by several government agencies and has been allowed to operate with a record of non-compliance and human rights violations. A ‘corrective action plan’ will not bring justice to the many students who have been abused over the years. These are grounds for firing of leadership and staff, financial contributions being pulled, and a deep, long look at how to transform how young people are rehabilitated in this state and country,” said **Julien Terrell, Executive Director of Philadelphia Student Union.**

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